

The Lawyer's Essential Guide to Writing

By Marie Buckley (Chicago, IL: ABA Law Practice Management Section, 2011) 261 pgs. \$79.95.
Order, www.ababooks.org.

Reviewed by Christopher P. Keleher

Authors of legal-writing books face an unenviable task – discovering originality in an area almost devoid of it. Many forests have been felled on the topic of legal writing, and virtually every book, article, and seminar echoes the mantra: be persuasive, be succinct, be clear. But ask judges about the matter, and their grimaces confirm that lawyers continue to ignore these essentials. One book that attempts to bridge that writer-audience disconnect is *The Lawyer's Essential Guide to Writing*. It does not disappoint.

Brimming with invaluable techniques, this book is best absorbed in small doses. The tips run from the prosaic – avoid starting sentences with “there” – to the profound – winning the battle for your readers’ attention. While the former is instructive, the latter is what distinguishes this book. The author emphasizes the proper writing mindset, a point that is pushed to the periphery, if addressed at all, in most legal writing manuals. Writers must show consideration for their reader. Yet too often lawyers forget a judge’s time is finite. Making it easy for the reader is the book’s theme, and the author offers numerous ways to achieve this, including attention-grabbing introductions, frequent use of subheadings, and powerful verbs.

Dismissing the author’s recommendations about word choice, sentence structure, and punctuation as personal style preferences would be wrong. Clear writing is a matter of substance that all lawyers must embrace. The author correctly notes that by varying sentence lengths, excising needless words, and dissolving long paragraphs, you will make your position better understood. Your audience will also appreciate not having to work to get your point.

The author’s passion for legal writing is clear and her belief that legal writing can be lively and engaging is accurate. Every brief is a blank canvas on which a writer can project originality and creativity. Embrace the opportunity by drafting a brief that is clear, concise, and powerful. This book provides the framework.

My effusiveness for this book is slightly tempered by the fact that it includes matters relating to letters, emails, and blogging. Good writing in these media is important, but such topics seem ill-fitted for a book devoted largely to briefs and motions. One other cavil is the \$80 price. While the content is worth it, some may find the price steep. But those deterred by the cost should consider that persuasive writing wins cases and victories beget new clients. Consider this book an investment that will pay dividends for years.

In sum, the author knows writing. And whether you are a newly minted lawyer or a seasoned veteran, immersing yourself in this book will do a great service to your practice, clients, and readers.

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